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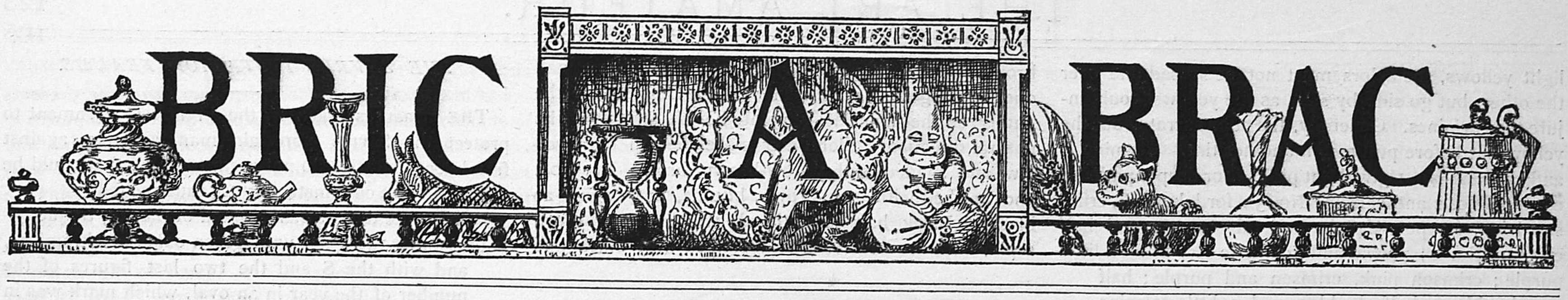


BRIC-A-BRAC

ROCK CRYSTAL WARE.

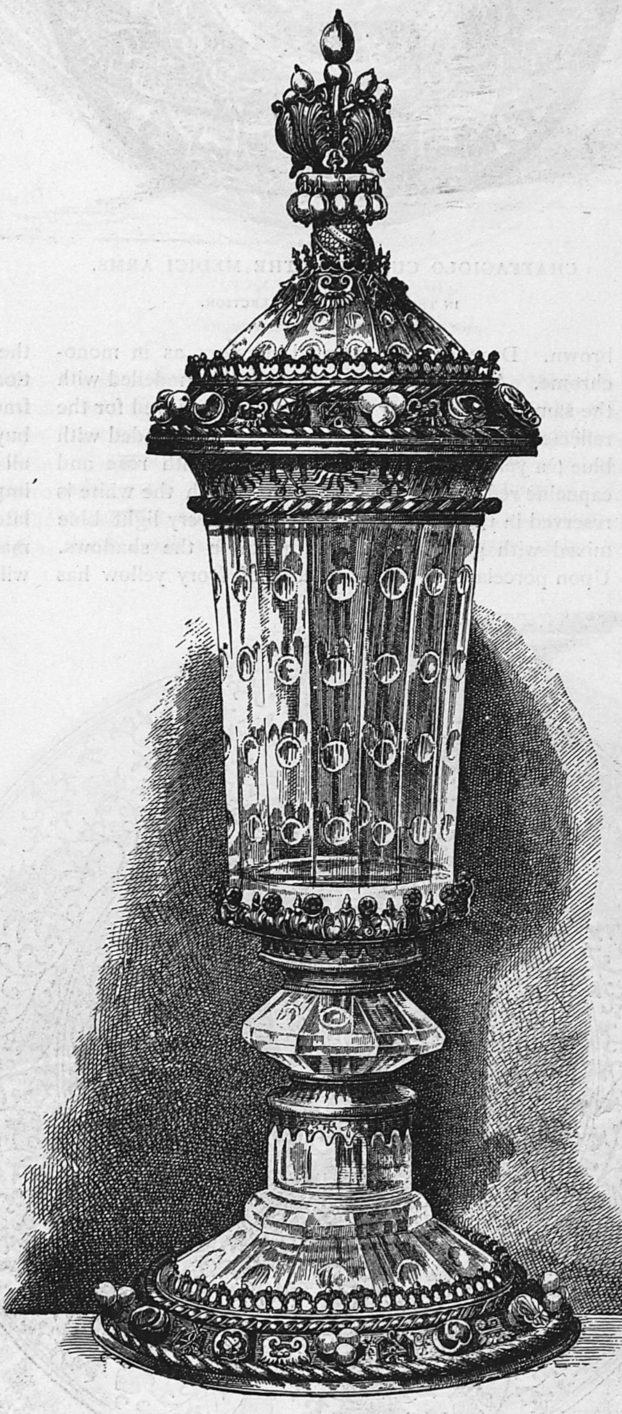
LIMPID quartz, or "rock crystal" as it is popularly called, has been used, in connection with gems and precious metals, for the manufacture of some of the most exquisite works of industrial art to be found in Europe. Numerous rare specimens are preserved in public museums in Paris and Florence, and the treasure chamber of Austrian royalty at Vienna contains a remarkably fine collection. The earliest in date in the Viennese "Schatzkammer" is the "goblet of Burgundy," which is in the form of a chalice. Upon the mounting, consisting of circles of gold chased and enamelled, groups of pearls alternate with the initial C of Charles the Bold and the "briquets" of Burgundy. This goblet was undoubtedly made anterior to 1477, the year of the death of the brave Burgundian duke, and probably at Bruges or Gand, the great industrial centres of the Burgundy of the fifteenth century. The reader may appreciate the beautiful proportions, the severe and elegant style, and the fineness of execution of this goblet, from the illustration given herewith. The "cornet," or ovoid vase, shown on the opposite page, is decorated, in intaglio, with the judgment of Paris, Leda and the swan, and other mythological subjects, while the signs of the zodiac are displayed on the border. The glass shown in the same illustration is also profusely decorated with mythological groups. Both these objects are Italian work, and both are preserved in the "Schatzkammer." Our remaining illustration shows a sixteenth century "nef" in the Museum of the Louvre. Literally, a nef is a ship. The name is applied to an ornamental box, often in the shape of a ship, in which knives, forks, and spoons were generally kept.

OPAQUE AND TRANSLUCENT ENAMELS.

I.

IT is our intention to give in this department a series of fine examples of the various kinds of opaque and translucent enamels. There are perhaps no works of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance which give a better idea of the progress of the art culture of those times. For the better appreciation by the general reader of the examples we shall give, we devote the present article to some account of the various methods employed of enamelling on metal. These methods correspond to three distinct periods, and they are thus distinguished, as forming three separate classes: 1. Incrusted. 2. Translucid upon relief. 3. Painted. In the first kind, the colors are divided from each other by thin lines of gold, the pattern or object represented being defined and mapped out into so many cells, by means of slender walls or partitions of gold filigree, before the coloring matter is inserted and fired. The appearance, therefore, is that of a kind of mosaic, each color being inclosed in a case or setting of gold. Sometimes, however, the ground only is colored. These enamels all partake of the Byzantine style, and this, together with the cumbrous process, however delicate the mere workmanship, combine to give almost unmitigated ugliness to the representations attempted. In the second kind, the design is delicately chiselled in relief upon the metal, the surface of which is then covered with translucid enamels. In the third, or most artistic kind, the use of the metal corresponds to that of the canvas or wood in oil painting; vitrifiable colors are laid on with a brush, either on the surface of the metal, or more generally upon a layer of enamel with which the metal has been previously coated, so as to produce at once the design and the coloring.

The first kind, or incrusted enamels, is subdivided into two classes, which bear names given them by French antiquaries, namely, the "cloisonné" (partitioned), or "à cloisons mobiles" (with movable partitions), and the "champlevé" (cut or carved-out ground). We shall confine ourselves, in the first place, to the cloisonné enamels. In these the metal is first cut into the requisite shape, and provided with a little rim for the purpose of retaining the enamel. Thin strips, or fillets, of the metal of the same width (or, we may say depth, supposing them measured vertically, as placed to receive the enamel), were then bent and fashioned in such a manner as to form the outline of the pattern or representation, and frequently even the most minute portions of the figure. These strips were next joined and fixed in an upright position upon the plate, thus forming a continuous metal outline. Each little bed or partition was then filled up with various enamels, reduced to a fine powder and moistened into a paste, and the piece finally underwent the firing process in a furnace. Sometimes the metal formed the ground out of which the space for the figure was scooped, the figure being then executed in the manner described. The colors used by the enameller were very rich; white, black, and lapis-lazuli (ultramarine) blue are always opaque; the other colors are sometimes opaque, sometimes semi-translucent. These enamels were also occasionally executed on copper. These cloisonné enamels are commonly of small size, and were chiefly used for ornamenting shrines, vases, crowns, and other objects; and when so employed they were fixed in a projecting setting, like precious stones. From having been executed upon a groundwork of gold, few have escaped the crucible of the goldsmith, and they are, therefore, very rare.



ROCK CRYSTAL GOBLET.

IN THE IMPERIAL "SCHATZKAMMER" AT VIENNA.

The crown of Charlemagne, preserved at Vienna, is ornamented with enamels of this description, representing Solomon, David, King Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Christ. The workmanship is Greek; but, though retouched, it is believed the enamels must belong to this early period. The largest and finest known works of this process are, however, the famous Pala d'Oro at Venice, and parts of the shrine of the Three Kings at Cologne. The celebrated and much-revered relic, the Dagmar Cross of Denmark, a copy of which (as a pendant to a necklace) was given as a wedding present to the Princess of Wales by her uncle the late King of Denmark, is a cloisonné enamel. The most curious specimen in England is the Alfred jewel in the Ashmolean Museum; and this is still more remarkable, if, as is supposed, it was wrought by a British artist in the Byzantine manner. The cloisonné method is decidedly Byzantine.

The Greek artists probably derived the process of cloisonné enamel from the Egyptians, who appear to have got it from the Oriental nations, who practised the art in remote antiquity. In the very interesting Abbott collection of Egyptian antiquities in the rooms of the New York Historical Society is a scarab in cloisonné enamel admirably preserved, although of great antiquity. It might easily pass for a Japanese work but for the subject. That the Chinese had relations with the Egyptians many centuries before the Christian era seems evident from the number of Chinese ceramic objects discovered in the Egyptian tombs during various excavations. If the Greeks and Romans were acquainted with enamelling, the methods were entirely lost in Italy and Greece. The cloisonné enamels came to be in very general use in the twelfth century; but in the fourteenth they were superseded by translucid enamels upon relief.

The second kind of incrusted enamels, it has been said, are called champlevé—cut or carved-out ground. In these, as in the last, a slender line of metal describes on the surface of the enamel the principal outlines of the design. But, instead of applying thin fillets of gold, the cells or cavities were scooped out of the substance of the groundwork, and thin walls of the metal left to form the outline and contain the vitreous matters. The flesh, and even the whole figure, were, however, not unfrequently represented by the metal, the outlines and the portions in shade being very finely engraved, or chiselled in bas-relief. The metal was almost always copper, the cheapness of the material admitting the use of plates of larger size. The champlevé enamels are generally complete works of art in themselves; unlike the former, which were usually attached as ornaments to pieces of jewelry and plate. The vitreous matter was commonly employed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to color nothing but the ground, and thus form a border round the figures in gilded metal. The practice of representing the flesh tints by enamels approaching the natural color, and of using colors in the